

## U.S. charges Indian citizen in Pannun murder plot

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



### VIKASH YADAV

Murder-For-Hire; Conspiracy to Commit Murder-For-Hire; Money Laundering Conspiracy



The U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) charged an Indian citizen, Vikash Yadav directing a plot to murder pro-Khalistan activist and Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) Chief Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York last year. Pannun, a U.S. citizen is an India-designated terrorist. The charges against Mr. Yadav were announced on Thursday by the DoJ, two days after an Indian investigating team visited Washington DC. Mr. Yadav was charged in a second superseding indictment unsealed on Thursday in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Mr. Yadav was identified thus far as “CC-1” in the original indictment filed by the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) related to the murder-for-hire plot in 2023. Another Indian, Nikhil Gupta, was charged last year and is currently being detained in Brooklyn following his arrest in the Czech Republic last year. India-based Mr. Yadav, it is alleged, had recruited Mr. Gupta to find a hitman and have Pannun killed.

As per the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ), Mr. Yadav was “employed by the Government of India’s Cabinet Secretariat, which houses India’s foreign intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing”, during the period relevant to the case. A ‘Wanted by the FBI’ notice accuse Mr. Yadav communicating with his co-conspirator, another Indian national, to facilitate the plot. Yadav allegedly provided information, such as the victim’s residential addresses, phone numbers, and other identifying information, to the Indian national in furtherance of the plot.

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## J&K Cabinet resolution presses for Statehood

### POIITY & GOVERNANCE

The Jammu and Kashmir Cabinet, led by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, passed a resolution calling for the restoration of Statehood to the Union Territory. A Cabinet note made a unanimous appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to “restore Statehood to the U.T. of J&K”. J&K was split into two Union Territories in August 2019 and its special constitutional status under provisions of Article 370 abrogated. Mr. Abdullah is likely to hand over the resolution to the Prime Minister as a “collective demand of the people of J&K”. The Supreme Court will consider listing a plea seeking a time-bound restoration of Statehood to J&K.

Mr. Abdullah government has distributed portfolios among the five Ministers, two of them from the Kashmir valley and three from the Jammu region. No elected Congress leader has joined Mr. Abdullah’s Cabinet so far, in spite of the party being an alliance partner.

Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary has been given the portfolios of Public Works (Roads and Buildings), Industries and Commerce, Mining, Labour and Employment, and Skill Development.

NC legislator Sakeena Masood Itoo got the portfolios of Health and Medical Education, and School Education, Higher Education and Social Welfare. Javed Ahmed Rana has been given Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology and Environment and Tribal Affairs, while Javid Ahmad Dar got charge of Agriculture Production, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Cooperative, and Election.

Satish Sharma, who won as an Independent candidate from Jammu’s Chhamb constituency, was given the portfolios of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Transport, Science and Technology, Information Technology, Youth Services and Sports and ARI and Trainings.

## House panel to deliberate on India’s readiness to deal with ‘non-kinetic warfare’

### POIITY & GOVERNANCE

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence has narrowed down preparedness of Indian armed forces in “hybrid warfare” to deal with that as one of the 17 subjects for deliberations for the year. According to informed sources, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, a member of the committee, spoke extensively on the growing danger of “non-kinetic warfare” citing the examples of ‘non-kinetic warfare’ in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts, where these methods have been deployed. Several other members concurred with the view, citing the recent spate of pager blasts in Lebanon, which is an example of a “non-kinetic warfare”.

### Evolving concept

Kinetic warfare typically means military employing a range of weapons. Non-kinetic warfare is an evolving concept, it goes beyond the usual military tactics and can involve electronic warfare, cyber, information, psychological and economic among others. Importantly, it can involve non-military stakeholders too. With technological progress, many believe that the non-kinetic warfare can turn out to be deadlier than the traditional methods.

In the domain of counter-drone technologies, the armed forces have been looking to induct a range of kinetic and non-kinetic solutions to neutralise drones and drone swarms. The House panel will also assess the “strategic operational preparedness of the defence forces in view of the current international

security scenario, including border security,” which will involve reviewing the prolonged stand-off on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China.

Among other topics, the panel will be reviewing “indigenous defence production”, “resettlement policies, healthcare facilities and avenues for ex-servicemen” and “assessment of next of kin policy in the armed forces.”

## GE marine engines to power Navy’s missile vessels

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Engine manufacturer General Electric announced that its LM2500 marine engines have been chosen to power Indian Navy’s Next Generation Missile Vessels (NGMV) being built by Cochin Shipyard Limited.

Six LM2500 marine gas turbine engine kits will be delivered by GE Aerospace for assembly and test by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) Industrial and Marine Gas Turbine Division in Bengaluru, India. Additionally, GE Aerospace will be supplying its composite base and enclosure, and full complement of gas turbine auxiliary systems.

#### New design

The Union Ministry of Defence awarded a ₹9,805 Cr. construction of six Next Generation Missile Vessels (NGMVs) for the Indian Navy with deliveries scheduled to commence from March 2027. The Next Generation Missile Vessels (NGMV) is a new design for the Indian Navy that will reach a maximum speed of 35 knots and carry an impressive array of anti-surface weapons.

## Modi to visit Russia next week to take part in BRICS summit

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be on a visit to Russia on October 22 and 23 to attend the BRICS Summit. The PM is also “expected to hold bilateral meetings with his counterparts from BRICS member countries and invited leaders” on the sidelines.

The Russian envoy at an online conference on BRICS organised by Centre for Global India Insights and India Writes Network recognised BRICS as a platform respecting civilizational diversity and offers a platform for mutually beneficial dialogue free from pressure, double standards or interference in domestic affairs, adding that it was natural for the grouping to expand one way or another. The envoy added that when it comes to BRICS membership, the aspiring countries should be “economically ambitious” and “oppose illegitimate sanctions”. He also called for an alternative to the SWIFT system used for global payments from which Russia was expelled after the beginning of war in Ukraine.

Member countries have been pushing for greater use of national currencies for trade among themselves. Diplomatic sources said this was a priority for Russia while ruling out the possibility of a common BRICS currency. Addressing the conference, South Africa’s High Commissioner-designate to India Anil Sooklal said last year’s focus of BRICS was its expansion, and we have done that quite effectively bringing the global south to the table.



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## ED attaches ₹ 56-cr. assets in money laundering probe against PFI; '13,000 members in Singapore, West Asia'

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached 35 immovable properties worth ₹ 56.56 Cr. in connection with the money laundering probe against the banned Popular Front of India (PFI). The outfit had more than 13,000 active members in Singapore, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

The ED probe is based on various cases registered by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and other enforcement agencies. According to the ED, the outfit raised funds to the tune of ₹ 94 Cr. from different parts of the country and abroad. The money was deposited in its 29 bank accounts in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, and Manipur.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has so far arrested 26 accused persons linked to the proscribed outfit and submitted nine prosecution complaints in the case from February 2021 to May 2024. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) cite PFI forming well-defined District Executive Committees (DECs) for the Non-Resident Muslim diaspora living in the Gulf countries, which was tasked with collection of funds. Each DEC was given a target of several crores of rupees for funds collection. The funds raised abroad were transferred to India through circuitous banking channels, as well as through underground 'hawala' channels... thereafter, handed over to PFI and its office-bearers to finance their terrorist and unlawful activities".

The ED probe revealed that the "real objectives of PFI include formation of an organisation for carrying out an Islamic movement in India through Jihad, though PFI masquerades itself as a social movement. PFI claimed use of non-violent forms of protest but evidence reveal that the methods of protest employed by them are violent in nature". It allegedly took steps to prepare for a "civil war by creating unrest and strife in society".

### 'Secret agents'

As alleged, the PFI employed several methods for undermining national unity and sovereignty, ranging from civil disobedience of laws, running a parallel government, and even disclosing the identities of "secret agents". It posed an economic threat through counterfeiting of goods, preclusive purchasing/non-violent takeover/seizure of assets. PFI was giving arms training under the garb of physical education classes for imparting offensive and defensive manoeuvres using different variations of blows, punches, kicks, knife and stick attacks.

It is alleged that the PFI members were involved in inciting violence and fomenting trouble leading to the Delhi riots of February 2020. The PFI/CFI members visited Hathras (Uttar Pradesh) with an intent to disturb communal harmony, incite communal riots, and spread terror. The outfit was organising a training camp with an intent to cause disturbance during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Patna visit on July 12, 2022. Besides the assets in the name of PFI's Basheer T. and Abdul Salam T.P., the properties attached by the ED are in the name of entities operating in different parts of Kerala.

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## SC recalls its 2022 judgment on benami law amendments

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

A Special Bench of the Supreme Court on Friday recalled its August 23, 2022 judgment which declared provisions and amendments made in the benami property law “unconstitutional and manifestly arbitrary”. The Bench, headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, referred the case for fresh adjudication.

The amendments, introduced in 2016, had applied retrospectively and could send a person to prison for three years. They empowered the Centre to confiscate “any property” subject to a benami transaction. The decision to recall and have a re-look at the issue was based on review petitions filed by the Union government and Deputy Commissioner of Income Tax (Benami Prohibition). The government was represented by Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta.

The 2022 judgment traversed beyond the ambit of the question raised, to declare Section 3(2) of the unamended 1988 Act “unconstitutional for being manifestly arbitrary”. The verdict under question had found Section 3(2) of the 2016 Act as violating Article 20(1) of the Constitution, which prohibits retrospective punishment.

The Review Bench on Friday said the parties were free to argue on the constitutionality of the benami law provisions before the appropriate Bench. The court made it clear that the arguments which led to the 2022 verdict had not squarely addressed the issue of the constitutional validity of Sections 3(2) and 5.

## Interest rate cut at this stage could be premature, highly risky: RBI Chief

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday asserted an interest rate cut at this stage could be “premature” and “very very risky” as retail inflation was still high, and future monetary policy action would depend on incoming data and outlook. Earlier this month, the RBI announced status quo in repo rate, citing inflationary concerns, though it changed the monetary policy stance to ‘neutral’.

The September inflation was high and the next print too was expected to remain elevated before moderating. “So, therefore, rate cut at this stage will be very premature and can be very, very risky when your inflation is five and a half and next print is also expected to be high”. Refusing to give any indications about rate cuts in future, the RBI Governor said the central bank would take action on the basis of the incoming data and outlook.

The Reserve Bank of India maintains tight vigil on the market and takes regulatory action whenever necessary. The remark comes a day after the central bank directed Sachin Bansal’s Navi Finserv and three other NBFCs to cease and desist from sanctioning and disbursing loans effective from the close of business of October 21 on material supervisory concerns, including usurious pricing.



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## Inflation could rise 0.2% thanks to the MSP hikes for crops: economists

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

India's retail inflation rebounded to a 9-month high of 5.5 % in September, could stay buoyant this month, too, amid hardening vegetable prices, and Centre's recent hike in minimum support price (MSP) for crops ahead of the Rabi sowing season could add a tad more momentum to food inflation. The delayed exit of monsoon rains in October remains a worry. Vegetable prices in the first 10 days of October have risen by 10-20%, and may lead to a similarly elevated print in October. They expect food prices will begin to fall from November, with cooling temperatures and healthier reservoir levels.

However, with the Union Cabinet announcing a 2.4% to 7% hike in the MSP for the upcoming Rabi crop, there could be some impact on some key crops whose inflation is already elevated. For instance, MSP for wheat, which saw a 6.7% rise in retail prices in September, has been raised by 6.6%.

The hikes are relatively lower for mustard (5.3%), masoor (4.3%) and chana (3.9%), but the price rise in the latter two was high in September with chana retail prices up 21.2%.

If the entire increase in MSP is passed on to final prices for all output in an extreme scenario, the impact on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) would be around 0.27%. However, this would normally hold for wheat where there is procurement, and may not be the case for other crops, pegging the overall inflationary impact of MSP hikes at around 0.18-0.20% over a year.

While chana and masoor have 0.5% weight in the basket, mustard oil accounts for 1.3%. For wheat and atta together, CPI has 2.73% weight. The four crops have a weight of almost 4.5% in the retail inflation gauge.

## Spotted locusts invade farms in Idukki, destroy crops

### ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT



The changing climate pattern in the hill district of Kerala poses a threat to its farming sector. Amid the crop loss suffered from incursions by wild animals — and creatures like Malabar parakeets and snails — farmers in Idukki are now reeling under the menace of spotted locust infestation. At Konnathady and Vathikudy grama panchayats, farmers have reported that grasshoppers in large numbers are engulfing their farms, leading to significant crop loss.

Plantations of over 70 farmers were severely affected by the spotted locust infestation. The infestation is being reported in Konnathady and Vathikudy panchayats in Idukki. These insects are attacking coconut trees, bananas, cardamom, pepper, and even large trees. The Agriculture Department had conducted awareness camps for farmers to prevent the infestation and protect their plants.



## Crops destroyed

The pests were identified as spotted grasshopper/spotted locust (*Aularches miliaris*), belonging to the insect family Pyrgomorphidae. Large numbers of winged adults were found denuding various crops such as banana, coconut, cardamom, vegetables, areca nut, wild plants and Glyricidia and teak trees. Simultaneously paired adults were seen having pre-oviposition feeding on crops, too. The affected crops were severely destroyed, leaving only midribs or partial leaf lamina hanging from the plants, especially in banana, coconut, etc.

For management, the farmers can plough the field to expose the egg pods laid by the grasshoppers into the soil to harsh sun rays. Farmers may spray neem oil (5 to 10 ml per litre of water) on grasshopper bands or the plants to act as a repellent or feeding deterrent. In emergency conditions as a last resort, farmers may spray insecticides like Lambda-cyhalothrin onto the attacked plants," he said.

## Hit by climate change

According to the expert, the changing climate pattern is the major reason for the infestation. The variation of temperature and excess and decline of rainfall also causes various pest attacks. The snail attacks in cardamom plantations and grasshopper attacks in parts of Idukki district are also indications of changing climate pattern. Such climate variations should negatively impact the livelihood of the farming community.

# A perilous highway to salvation in the Himalayas

## ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

The 900-kilometre long, 12-metre wide, two-lane Char Dham Highway Project to boost religious tourism to four shrines will end up as an endeavour with catastrophic consequences for the mountain ecology. The conclusions of a scientific paper written recently by a group of authors led by Jürgen Mey of the Institute of Environmental Science and Geography, University of Potsdam, Germany, confirm the worst fears expressed by the experts. This supposedly all-weather road project, at an outlay of ₹12,000 crore, was initiated despite intense opposition by environmental organisations in Uttarakhand, who called it unscientific.

## Domino effect

The paper presents the study results of fully or partially road-blocking landslides between Rishikesh and Joshimath, along National Highway (NH-7) in Uttarakhand. Based on instances of more than 300 landslides along the 250 km-long corridor after exceptionally high rainfall between September and October 2022, the study identified "309 fully or partially road-blocking landslides along the 247 km long road, which amounts to an average landslide density of 1.25 landslides per kilometre".

While identifying variables such as slope angle, rainfall amount, and lithology as the controlling factors, the study singles out "the road-widening [as] having a doubling impact on the road-blocking landslides". The construction has now proved to be the prime cause of landslides, whose occurrences have doubled over the years. Deaths and accidents on the Char Dham road have become a daily occurrence during the pilgrimage season. This conclusion supports the earlier expert committee reports — overruled by the authorities — that had flagged improper construction practices during the road widening work in the Uttarakhand Himalayas.

The researchers have also predicted an uptick in summer monsoon precipitation due to elevation-dependent warming in the years to come. Thus, landslides and fatalities will become more frequent as climate change prediction models suggest more frequent extreme rainfall events. The study underscores that important environmental caveats must be respected before commencing any mammoth engineering project in the Indian Himalayas.

The authorities put forth the reason for wanting “smoother” and “faster all-weather” connectivity for pilgrim tourists from the plains and the armed forces and armaments, but the engineering interventions have been done with scant regard to the local geology and environment. The government has ignored its original policy framework recommending “best practice” norms for infrastructural expansion in mountainous regions to minimise the negative impact on the mountain ecosystems and landscapes.

The project, which was initiated under the ‘Char Dham Pariyojana’, is in fundamental violation of all environmental norms and conservation strategies that need to be followed in the Himalayas.

The government used a technical loophole and divided the project into 50-plus smaller projects to bypass environmental clearance and impact assessment reports. Calling the project a ‘geological and ecological fraud’, the petitioners have argued that the roads were longer than 100 km in some stretches and would have a cumulative impact on the whole region. Land encroachment combined with the blasting and the cutting of slopes for developmental projects causes additional stress on a fragile ecosystem. One accepts that roads are the lifeline of remote mountainous regions, but such megaprojects must fully consider the region’s environmental fragility.

Though the project began as a tourism project, it was finally defended in the Supreme Court of India as a defence-related requirement for moving troops and armaments, ignoring the point that the defence forces can airlift troops and heavy artillery during emergencies. The Court initially favouring a narrower intermediate road width for the highways (5.5 m), based on the recommendation of an expert committee appointed in 2019 and a Ministry of Road Transport and Highways’ circular of 2018. But the Court finally permitted the Union Government to go ahead with the project on widening the hill roads from a national security angle.

### **No scientific assessment**

It is a matter of concern that such massive projects are getting the go-ahead without any scientific assessment especially in an unstable and fragile region such as the Indian Himalayas. A key question is this: is mountain morphology, with steep slopes and sharp gradients, easily amenable to human engineering? Unlike the hinterland in the mountains, the steep gradients of the Uttarakhand Himalaya or the Himachal Himalaya make them dynamically heterogeneous in terms of climatic variables and hydrological and tectonic processes at every turn of the mountain path.

A widened road faces problems now as it is constantly blocked by recurrent landslides. It is most likely that this project will end up not being what it was envisioned to be. Not only would the movement of troops or armaments be delayed in critical moments but also much time and resources would have to be used to clear or reconstruct damaged road stretches. Year-wise statistics show a rise in the loss of human lives. In the last four years, 160 people have lost their life in landslide incidents in Uttarakhand, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

The entire region has been destabilised due to massive construction activities. Ground subsidence is now recognised as a “silent disaster” in many parts of the Himalayas. In a study published in Scientific Reports this year, widely reported land deformation in Joshimath town is being attributed to uncontrolled anthropogenic activities, infrastructural development and inadequate drainage systems. Recently, it has been reported that the Tungnath temple in the Rudraprayag district is facing serious issues such as subsidence, weakening foundation and shifting wall slates, which have caused water leakage especially during the rainy season.

Such incidents have not impacted the government’s thinking on its developmental models for such fragile areas. Unsurprisingly, the Border Roads Organisation is now seeking clearance to widen the Gangotri-Dharasu stretch in the fragile Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone, whose integrity is important for the ecology of the Ganga river near its origin.



## The issue of local distress

According to Census 2011, of Uttarakhand's 16,793 villages, 1,053 have no inhabitants, while another 405 have a population of less than 10 people. This situation must have been aggravated recently since large-scale infrastructural projects were brought into the hill State. Internal and external migration have led to depopulation and land abandonment in rural areas despite the State government's initiatives in incentivising agriculture. Road widening, that promotes increased motorised tourism, will encourage entrepreneurs from the plains to set up hotels and business centres, often forcing the local people to opt for employment in the tourism industry rather than sticking to farming.

Environmental factors such as the depletion of water resources and other emerging hazards may have resulted in people leaving the agriculture sectors. With low returns from the land, farmers sell their lands to private entrepreneurs from the plains.

The State government is countering this trend by framing laws against selling land to outsiders, but this is a step that will not mitigate the local distress caused by human-induced environmental degradation. The State government claims that Uttarakhand's GSDP has increased 1.3 times in 20 months and that the unemployment rate has decreased by 4.4% in one year. By its admission, people in the State have obtained more employment in tourism.

Making feel-good speeches on climate-change resilience in COP meetings while implementing disaster-prone infrastructure in the country's most fragile area proves a double standard. The Himalayas face multifaceted environmental challenges that require well-thought-out sustainable pathways. The Union and State governments must scale down these ongoing massive construction programmes, which include dams, and formulate sound ecological solutions for the mess they have already created.

## Forecasting better in India, come rain or shine

### GEOGRAPHY

The monsoon season this year in India has been one of the worst in recent times, with recurrent flooding impacting most States. According to a 2021 study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), approximately 40 % of districts in India experience alternating climatic hazards, which means that flood-prone regions are also facing droughts during the dry season and vice-versa. Separately, an analysis of 40 years of rainfall data by CEEW shows that there has been an increase of up to 64 % in heavy rainfall days during the monsoons over the last decade.

### Extreme weather needs better forecasting

In this increasingly complex scenario, while nearly two-thirds of India's population are exposed to flood risks, only a third of the flood-prone population is covered by early warning systems. This is in stark contrast to cyclone early warning systems which cover all cyclone-prone areas in the country. It is evident that India must invest in enhancing weather forecasting and bringing technological innovation to the forefront, as a safety net, to address the growing extreme weather risks.

The 'Mission Mausam' that was approved in September 2024 broadly focuses on increasing India's weather observation network, improving weather forecasting models and investigating weather modification techniques. The mission will be implemented primarily by three institutes under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, namely the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM). The ₹ 2,000 crore initiative aims to augment the weather observation network using a variety of instruments while also improving forecasting models through an improved understanding of the physics of the atmosphere and the integration of machine-learning approaches.

To harness its potential, India must expand its forecasting capabilities in areas that face a high climate risk and make data widely available for developing use cases across sectors such as energy, agriculture and water. These are the key pathways 'Mission Mausam' should focus on.

### **Gaps in radar coverage, limited data access**

First, prioritise installing weather observation platforms on India's western coast and in large urban centres facing high climate risks. India has 39 Doppler Weather Radars (DWRs) to monitor rainfall, with many covering a radius of 250 kilometres. These provide short-term forecasts, ranging from minutes to a few hours, of extreme rainfall events. Nine of these radars are located in the Himalayan States, eight along the eastern coast, and 17 located in various Indian cities. The remaining five are on the west coast. Recent studies indicate that cyclones are becoming more frequent and intense in the Arabian Sea. But, as said, only five radars monitor the entire west coast. Even key cities such as Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Bengaluru (Karnataka), and Jodhpur (Rajasthan), which have faced repeated flooding recently, do not have radars as yet. Therefore, 'Mission Mausam' should prioritise the installation of weather radars and other observational platforms in areas that have not been covered as yet and which face growing climate risks.

Second, make weather data openly available for researchers and entrepreneurs to develop use cases. Open access to weather data helps in the analysis of trends and in understanding the causes behind extreme weather events better. It also helps in the creation of localised early warning tools. For instance, the United States has made the data from its 160 DWRs openly available which has resulted in the creation of several analytical tools to support local governments. Similarly, the United Kingdom, France, and the European Union have made their weather forecasting data available on cloud for anyone to access. While the IMD shares data through its data supply portal, restrictions remain on the volume of data provided.

Moreover, the data on the portal is not freely available to researchers from academic institutions and think tanks. Therefore, 'Mission Mausam' should establish infrastructure to distribute data generated by the new instruments, such as weather radars, wind profilers and radiometers, in the public domain. Moreover, the data from the weather forecasting models developed as part of the mission should also be placed in the public domain for researchers to validate and provide suggestions for improvement. This will foster innovation and localised decision-making.

### **Reaching out to users**

Third, improve communication tools for weather warnings and enhance user capacity. The IMD disseminates weather information through multiple channels, which include web and mobile applications. Over the years, the web application has been significantly strengthened to the extent that it now provides district-wise weather warnings that range from an hour to the next four days of forecast. However, the user experience could be improved further. While the tool offers helpful warnings, providing users with guidance on how to interpret these warnings would enhance their experience. 'Mission Mausam' must focus on enhancing users' capacity to understand and act on warnings through informative videos, media, and guides.

'Mission Mausam' is a timely move by the Union government to make the country weather ready and climate smart through an expanded observational network and improved weather forecasting. With improvements, the mission can transform how weather information is shared and understood in India. This is critical at a time when extreme weather events are taking a heavy toll on lives and livelihoods.

## Fate of nations

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

The 2024 economics Nobel Prize is an important one as it highlights what really matters at the end of the day for the long-term economic success of any country. U.S. economists Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James A. Robinson were rewarded for their work on how the quality of institutions in a country can lead it either down the path of economic prosperity or abject poverty. Their study was on the effects of colonialism on the quality of institutions and post-colonial growth of various countries. They found that countries with institutions that secured the rule of law and enforced property rights offered individuals a strong incentive to work, save and invest in the long run. On the other hand, countries with extractive institutions which gave rise to concentration of power and constrained political freedoms suffered deep economic pain. Some have pointed to the authors' lack of a substantial critique of the brutality of colonialism and of painting too rosy a picture of the development of western institutions.

The "institutions" that the laureates talk about as crucial to long-term economic prosperity are nothing but the various rules, which could be either explicit laws or implicit social norms that govern human interaction in society. Such institutions may also include laws that protect citizens from expropriation by the government. The rapid economic growth of China and India since their economic liberalisation in the late 1970s and the early 1990s, respectively, are good examples of countries prospering soon after a significant change in the nature of the institutions or the "rules of the game" that governed their economies. Structural reforms that further improve the quality of institutions are thus crucial if these economies are to achieve living standards similar to those of high-income developed countries in the West. Notably, the Nobel also comes at a time when existing institutions around the world are under the significant threat of being destabilised by personality-driven populist movements. It is worth noting that in their work, the Nobel laureates have classified democracy as an important "inclusive" institution that is good for long-term economic growth. However, the rise of illiberal democracies with protectionist economic policies in recent years shows that liberal institutions that work for the upliftment of the many and development not just for a few, are now under severe threat. A democracy driven by short-term populist policies can be as "extractive" as an autocracy that serves the interests of a narrow elite that is close to people in power.



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